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BY

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CONTENTS.

FIRST SERIES.

	PAGE
THE SCHOOL OF HISTORY	1
THE TIMES OF TRAVEL AND LETTERS	
Lecture I.	39
Lecture II.	76
Lecture III.	114
THE INFLUENCE OF THE REFORMATION ON THE SCOTTISH CHARACTER	134
THE PHILOSOPHY OF CATHOLICISM	165
A PLEA FOR THE FREEDISCUSSION OF THEOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES	207
CRITICISM AND THE GOSPEL HISTORY	241
THE BOOK OF JOB	254
SPINOZA	339
THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES	371
ENGLAND'S FORGOTTEN WORTHIES	443
HOMER	502

	PAGE
THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS	545
REPRESENTATIVE MEN	576
REYNARD THE FOX	600
THE CAT'S PILGRIMAGE :	
Part I.	630
Part II.	638
Part III.	643
Part IV.	648
FABLES :	
I. The Lions and the Oxen	661
II. The Farmer and the Fox	663
PARABLE OF THE BREAD-FRUIT TREE	666
COMPENSATION	666

THE SCIENCE OF HISTORY:

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION,

FEBRUARY 5, 1864.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—I have undertaken to speak to you this evening on what is called the Science of History. I fear it is a dry subject; and there seems, indeed, something incongruous in the very connection of such words as Science and History. It is as if we were to talk of the colour of sound, or the longitude of the rule-of-three. Where it is so difficult to make out the truth on the commonest disputed fact in matters passing under our very eyes, how can we talk of a science in things long past, which come to us only through books? It often seems to me as if History was like a child's box of letters, with which we can spell any word we please. We have only to pick out such letters as we want, arrange them as we like, and say nothing about those which do not suit our purpose.

I will try to make the thing intelligible, and I will

those opinions have an unusual fascination. They do not please us, but they excite and irritate us. We are angry with them; and we betray, in being so, an uneasy misgiving that there may be more truth in their opinions than we like to allow.

Mr Buckle's general theory was something of this kind: When human creatures began first to look about them in the world they lived in, there seemed to be no order in anything. Days and nights were not the same length. The air was sometimes hot and sometimes cold. Some of the stars rose and set like the sun; some were almost motionless in the sky; some described circles round a central star above the north horizon. The planets went on principles of their own; and in the elements there seemed nothing but caprice. Sun and moon would at times go out in eclipse. Sometimes the earth itself would shake under men's feet; and they could only suppose that earth and air and sky and water were inhabited and managed by creatures as wayward as themselves.

Time went on, and the disorder began to arrange itself. Certain influences seemed beneficent to men, others malignant and destructive, and the world was supposed to be animated by good spirits and evil spirits, who were continually fighting against each other, in outward nature and in human creatures themselves. Finally, as men observed more and imagined less, these interpretations gave way also. Phenomena the most opposite in effect were seen to be the result of the same natural law. The fire did not burn the house down if

the owners of it were careful, but remained on the hearth and boiled the pot; nor did it seem more inclined to burn a bad man's house down than a good man's, provided the badness did not take the form of negligence. The phenomena of nature were found for the most part to proceed in an orderly, regular way, and their variations to be such as could be counted upon. From observing the order of things, the step was easy to cause and effect. An eclipse, instead of being a sign of the anger of Heaven, was found to be the necessary and innocent result of the relative position of sun, moon, and earth. The comets became bodies in space, unrelated to the being who had imagined that all creation was watching them and their doings. By degrees, caprice, volition, all symptoms of arbitrary action, disappeared out of the universe, and almost every phenomenon in earth or heaven was found attributable to some law, either under food or perceived to exist. Thus nature was reclaimed from the imagination. The first fantastic conception of things gave way before the moral; the moral in turn gave way before the natural; and at last there was left but one small tract of ground where the theory of law had failed to penetrate, the doings and character of human creatures themselves.

There, and only there, amidst the conflicts of reason and emotion, conscience and desire, spiritual forces were still conceived to exist. Cause and effect were not traceable when there was a free volition to disturb the connection. In all other things, from a given set

the condition of his mind, his whole proceedings on this planet, his creeds and constitutions, his good deeds and his bad, his arts and his sciences, his empires and his revolutions, would be found all to arrange themselves into clear relations of cause and effect.

If, when Mr Buckle pressed his conclusion, we objected the difficulty of finding what the truth about past times really was, he would admit it candidly as far as concerned individuals; but there was not the same difficulty, he said, with masses of men. We might disagree about the characters of Julius or Tiberius Cæsar, but we could know well enough the Romans of the Empire. We had their literature to tell us how they thought; we had their laws to tell us how they governed; we had the broad face of the world, the large mountainous outline of their general doings upon it, to tell us how they acted. He believed it was all reducible to laws, and could be made as intelligible as the growth of the chalk cliffs or the coal measures.

And thus consistently Mr Buckle cared little for individuals. He did not believe (as some one has said), that the history of mankind is the history of its great men. Great men with him were but larger atoms, obeying the same impulses with the rest, only perhaps a trifle more erratic. With them or without them, the course of things would have been much the same.

As an illustration of the truth of his view, he would point to the new science of Political Economy. Here already was a large area of human activity in which natural laws were found to act unerringly. Men had

gone on for centuries trying to regulate trade on moral principles. They had endeavoured to fix wages according to some imaginary rule of fairness; to fix prices by what they considered things ought to cost. They encouraged one trade or discouraged another, for moral reasons. They might as well have tried to work a steam engine on moral reasons. The great statesmen whose names were connected with these enterprises might have as well legislated that water should run uphill. There were natural laws fixed in the conditions of things: and to contend against them was the old battle of the Titans against the gods.

As it was with political economy, so it was with all other forms of human activity: and as the true laws of political economy explained the trouble which people fell into in old times, because they were ignorant of them, so the true laws of human nature, as soon as we knew them, would explain their mistakes in more serious matters, and enable us to manage better for the future. Geographical position, climate, air, soil, and the like, had their several influences. The northern nations are hardy and industrious, because they must till the earth if they would eat the fruits of it, and because the temperature is too low to make comfortable enjoyment. In the south, the soil is more productive, while the food is softer and less salutary, and in the exquisite air, as that land is needed to make the scene of existence delightful. Therefore, in the south are the men lazy and indolent.

True, there are difficulties in these views; the human

of the languid Italian was the home also of the sternest race of whom the story of mankind retains a record. And again, when we are told that the Spaniards are superstitious, because Spain is a country of earthquakes, we remember Japan, the spot in all the world where earthquakes are most frequent, and where at the same time there is the most serene disbelief in any supernatural agency whatsoever.

Moreover, if men grow into what they are by natural laws, they cannot help being what they are, and if they cannot help being what they are, a good deal will have to be altered in our general view of human obligations and responsibilities.

That, however, in these theories there is a great deal of truth is quite certain; were there but a hope that those who maintain them would be contented with this admission. A man born in a Mahometan country grows up a Mahometan; in a Catholic country, a Catholic; in a Protestant country, a Protestant. His opinions are like his language; he learns to think as he learns to speak; and it is absurd to suppose him responsible for being what nature makes him. We take pains to educate children. There is a good education and a bad education; there are rules well ascertained by which characters are influenced, and, clearly enough, it is no mere matter for a boy's free will whether he turns out well or ill. We try to train him into good habits; we keep him out of the way of temptations; we see that he is well taught; we mix kindness and strictness; we surround him with every

good influence we can command. These are what are termed the advantages of a good education: and if we fail to provide those under our care with it, and if they go wrong in consequence, the responsibility we feel to be as much ours as theirs. This is at once an admission of the power over us of outward circumstances.

In the same way, we allow for the strength of temptations, and the like.

In general, it is perfectly obvious that men do necessarily absorb, out of the influences in which they grow up, something which gives a complexion to their whole after-character.

When historians have to relate great social or speculative changes, the overthrow of a monarchy or the establishment of a creed, they do but half their duty if they merely relate the events. In an account, for instance, of the rise of Mahometanism, it is not enough to describe the character of the Prophet, the ends which he set before him, the means which he made use of, and the effect which he produced; the historian must show what there was in the condition of the Eastern races which enabled Mahomet to act upon them so powerfully; their existing beliefs, their existing moral and political condition.

In our estimate of the past, and in our calculations of the future—in the judgments which we pass upon one another, we measure responsibility, not by the thing done, but by the opportunities which people have had of knowing better or worse. In the efforts which we make to keep our children from bad associations or

friends we admit that external circumstances have a powerful effect in making men what they are.

But are circumstances everything? That is the whole question. A science of history, if it is more than a misleading name, implies that the relation between cause and effect holds in human things as completely as in all others, that the origin of human actions is not to be looked for in mysterious properties of the mind, but in influences which are palpable and ponderable.

When natural causes are liable to be set aside and neutralized by what is called volition, the word Science is out of place. If it is free to a man to choose what he will do or not do, there is no adequate science of him. If there is a science of him, there is no free choice, and the praise or blame with which we regard one another are impertinent and out of place.

I am trespassing upon these ethical grounds because, unless I do, the subject cannot be made intelligible. Mankind are but an aggregate of individuals—History is but the record of individual action; and what is true of the part, is true of the whole.

We feel keenly about such things, and when the logic becomes perplexing, we are apt to grow rhetorical and passionate. But rhetoric is only misleading. Whatever the truth may be, it is best that we should know it; and for truth of any kind we should keep our heads and hearts as cool as we can.

I will say at once, that if we had the whole case before us—if we were taken, like Leibnitz's Tarquin, into the council-chamber of nature, and were shown

what we really were, where we came from, and where we were going, however unpleasant it might be for some of us to find ourselves, like Tarquin, made into villains, from the subtle necessities of 'the best of all possible worlds;' nevertheless, some such theory as Mr Buckle's might possibly turn out to be true. Likely enough, there is some great 'equation of the universe' where the value of the unknown quantities can be determined. But we must treat things in relation to our own powers and position; and the question is, whether the sweep of those vast curves can be measured by the intellect of creatures of a day like ourselves.

The 'Faust' of Goethe, tired of the barren round of earthly knowledge, calls magic to his aid. He desires, first, to see the spirit of the *Macrocosmos*, but his heart fails him before he ventures that tremendous experiment, and he summons before him, instead, the spirit of his own race. There he feels himself at home. The stream of life and the storm of action, the everlasting ocean of existence, the web and the wool, and the roaring loom of time—he gazes upon them all, and in passionate exultation claims fellowship with the awful thing before him. But the majestic vision fades, and a voice comes to him—'Thou art fellow with the spirits which thy mind can grasp—not with me.'

Had Mr Buckle tried to follow his principles into detail, it might have fared no better with him than with 'Faust.'

What are the conditions of a science? and when may any subject be said to enter the scientific stage?

I suppose when the facts of it begin to resolve themselves into groups; when phenomena are no longer isolated experiences, but appear in connection and order; when, after certain antecedents, certain consequences are uniformly seen to follow; when facts enough have been collected to furnish a basis for conjectural explanation, and when conjectures have so far ceased to be utterly vague, that it is possible in some degree to foresee the future by the help of them.

Till a subject has advanced as far as this, to speak of a science of it is an abuse of language. It is not enough to say that there must be a science of human things, because there is a science of all other things. This is like saying the planets must be inhabited, because the only planet of which we have any experience is inhabited. It may or may not be true, but it is not a practical question; it does not affect the practical treatment of the matter in hand.

Let us look at the history of Astronomy.

So long as sun, moon, and planets were supposed to be gods or angels; so long as the sword of Orion was not a metaphor, but a fact, and the groups of stars which inlaid the floor of heaven were the glittering trophies of the loves and wars of the Pantheon, so long there was no science of Astronomy. There was fancy, imagination, poetry, perhaps reverence, but no science. As soon, however, as it was observed that the stars retained their relative places—that the times of their rising and setting varied with the seasons—that sun, moon, and planets moved among them in a plane, and ..

tions, just as the Scandinavian mythology survives now in the names of the days of the week : but for all that, the understanding was now at work on the thing ; Science had begun, and the first triumph of it was the power of foretelling the future. Eclipses were perceived to recur in cycles of nineteen years, and philosophers were able to say when an eclipse was to be looked for. The periods of the planets were determined. Theories were invented to account for their eccentricities ; and, false as those theories might be, the position of the planets could be calculated with moderate certainty by them. The very first result of the science, in its most imperfect stage, was a power of foresight ; and this was possible before any one true astronomical law had been discovered.

We should not therefore question the possibility of a science of history, because the explanations of its phenomena were rudimentary or imperfect : that they might be, and might long continue to be, and yet enough might be done to show that there was such a thing, and that it was not entirely without use. But how was it that in those rude days, with small knowledge of mathematics, and with no better instruments than flat walls and dial plates, the first astronomers made progress so considerable ? Because, I suppose, the phenomena which they were observing recurred, for the most part, within moderate intervals ; so that they

could collect large experience within the compass of their natural lives : because days and months and years were measurable periods, and within them the more simple phenomena perpetually repeated themselves.

But how would it have been if, instead of turning on its axis once in twenty-four hours, the earth had taken a year about it ; if the year had been nearly four-hundred years ; if man's life had been no longer than it is, and for the initial steps of astronomy there had been nothing to depend upon except observations recorded in history ? How many ages would have passed, had this been our condition, before it would have occurred to any one, that, in what they saw night after night, there was any kind of order at all ?

We can see to some extent how it would have been, by the present state of those parts of the science which in fact depend on remote recorded observations. The movements of the comets are still extremely uncertain. The times of their return can be calculated only with the greatest vagueness.

And yet such a hypothesis as I have suggested would but inadequately express the position in which we are in fact placed towards history. There the phenomena never repeat themselves. There we are dependent wholly on the record of things said to have happened once, but which never happen or can happen a second time. There no experiment is possible ; we can watch for no recurring fact to test the worth of our conjectures. It has been suggested, fancifully, that if we consider the universe to be infinite, time is the same as eternity,

nine years ago ; and could the inhabitants of Sirius see the earth at this moment, they would see the English army in the trenches before Sebastopol ; Florence Nightingale watching at Scutari over the wounded at Inkermann ; and the peace of England undisturbed by ‘Essays and Reviews.’

As the stars recede into distance, so time recedes with them, and there may be, and probably are, stars from which Noah might be seen stepping into the ark, Eve listening to the temptation of the serpent, or that older race, eating the oysters and leaving the shell-heaps behind them, when the Baltic was an open sea.

Could we but compare notes, something might be done ; but of this there is no present hope, and without it there will be no science of history. Eclipses, recorded in ancient books, can be verified by calculation, and lost dates can be recovered by them, and we can foresee by the laws which they follow when there will be eclipses again. Will a time ever be when the lost secret of the foundation of Rome can be recovered by historic laws ? If not, where is our science ? It may be said that this is a particular fact, that we can deal satisfactorily with general phenomena affecting eras and cycles. Well, then, let us take some general phenomenon. Mahometanism, for instance, or Buddhism. These are large enough. Can you imagine a science which

would have¹ *foretold* such movements as those? The state of things out of which they rose is obscure; but suppose it not obscure, can you conceive that, with any amount of historical insight into the old Oriental beliefs, you could have seen that they were about to transform themselves into those particular forms and no other?

It is not enough to say, that, after the fact, you can understand partially how Mahometanism came to be. All historians worth the name have told us something about that. But when we talk of science, we mean something with more ambitious pretences, we mean something which can foresee as well as explain; and, thus looked at, to state the problem is to show its absurdity. As little could the wisest man have foreseen this mighty revolution, as thirty years ago such a thing as Mormonism could have been anticipated in America; as little as it could have been foreseen that table-turning and spirit-rapping would have been an outcome of the scientific culture of England in the nineteenth century.

The greatest of Roman thinkers gazing mournfully at the seething mass of moral putrefaction round him, detected and deigned to notice among its elements a certain detestable superstition, so he called it, rising up amidst the offscouring of the Jews, which was named Christianity. Could Tacitus have looked forward nine

¹ It is objected that Geology is a science: yet that Geology cannot foretell the future changes of the earth's surface. Geology is not a century old, and its periods are measured by millions of years. Yet, if Geology cannot foretell future facts, it enabled Sir Roderick Murchison to foretell the discovery of Australian gold.

centuries to the Rome of Gregory VII., could he have beheld the representative of the majesty of the Cæsars holding the stirrup of the Pontiff of that vile and execrated sect, the spectacle would scarcely have appeared to him the fulfilment of a rational expectation, or an intelligible result of the causes in operation round him. Tacitus, indeed, was born before the science of history; but would M. Comte have seen any more clearly?

Nor is the case much better if we are less hard upon our philosophy; if we content ourselves with the past, and require only a scientific explanation of that.

First, for the facts themselves. They come to us through the minds of those who recorded them, neither machines nor angels, but fallible creatures, with human passions and prejudices. Tacitus and Thucydides were perhaps the ablest men who ever gave themselves to writing history; the ablest and also the most incapable of conscious falsehood. Yet even now, after all these centuries, the truth of what they relate is called in question. Good reasons can be given to show that neither of them can be confidently trusted. If we doubt with these, whom are we to believe?

Or again, let the facts be granted. To revert to my simile of the box of letters, you have but to select such facts as suit you, you have but to leave alone those which do not suit you, and let your theory of history be what it will, you can find no difficulty in providing facts to prove it.

You may have your Hegel's philosophy of history,

or you may have your Schlegel's philosophy of history ; you may prove from history that the world is governed in detail by a special Providence ; you may prove that there is no sign of any moral agent in the universe, except man ; you may believe, if you like it, in the old theory of the wisdom of antiquity ; you may speak, as was the fashion in the fifteenth century, of 'our fathers, who had more wit and wisdom than we ;' or you may talk of 'our barbarian ancestors,' and describe their wars as the scuffling of kites and crows.

You may maintain that the evolution of humanity has been an unbroken progress towards perfection ; you may maintain that there has been no progress at all, and that man remains the same poor creature that he ever was ; or, lastly, you may say with the author of the 'Contrat Social,' that men were purest and best in primeval simplicity—

When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

In all, or any of these views, history will stand your friend. History, in its passive irony, will make no objection. Like Jarno, in Goethe's novel, it will not condescend to argue with you, and will provide you with abundant illustrations of anything which you may wish to believe.

'What is history,' said Napoleon, 'but a fiction agreed upon ?' 'My friend,' said Faust to the student, who was growing enthusiastic about the spirit of past ages ; 'my friend, the times which are gone are a book with seven seals ; and what you call the spirit of past

repeat with distinctness; that the world is built somehow on moral foundations; that, in the long run, it is well with the good; in the long run, it is ill with the wicked. But this is no science; it is no more than the old doctrine taught long ago by the Hebrew prophets. The theories of M. Comte and his disciples advance us, after all, not a step beyond the trodden and familiar ground. If men are not entirely animals, they are at least half animals, and are subject in this aspect of them to the conditions of animals. So far as those parts of man's doings are concerned, which neither have, nor need have, anything moral about them, so far the laws of him are calculable. There are laws for his digestion, and laws of the means by which his digestive organs are supplied with matter. But pass beyond them, and where are we? In a world where it would be as easy to calculate men's actions by laws like those of positive philosophy as to measure the orbit of Neptune with a foot-rule, or weigh Sirius in a grocer's scale.

And it is not difficult to see why this should be. The first principle on which the theory of a science of history can be plausibly argued, is that all actions whatsoever arise from self-interest. It may be enlightened self-interest; it may be unenlightened; but it is assumed as an axiom, that every man, in whatever he does, is aiming at something which he considers will promote his happiness. His conduct is not determined

by his will ; it is determined by the object of his desire. Adam Smith, in laying the foundations of political economy, expressly eliminates every other motive. He does not say that men never act on other motives ; still less, that they never ought to act on other motives. He asserts merely that, as far as the arts of production are concerned, and of buying and selling, the action of self-interest may be counted upon as uniform. What Adam Smith says of political economy, Mr Buckle would extend over the whole circle of human activity.

Now, that which especially distinguishes a high order of man from a low order of man—that which constitutes human goodness, human greatness, human nobleness—is surely not the degree of enlightenment with which men pursue their own advantage ; but it is self-forgetfulness—it is self-sacrifice—it is the disregard of personal pleasure, personal indulgence, personal advantages remote or present, because some other line of conduct is more right.

We are sometimes told that this is but another way of expressing the same thing ; that when a man prefers doing what is right, it is only because to do right gives him a higher satisfaction. It appears to me, on the contrary, to be a difference in the very heart and nature of things. The martyr goes to the stake, the patriot to the scaffold, not with a view to any future reward to themselves, but because it is a glory to fling away their lives for truth and freedom. And so through all phases of existence, to the smallest details of common life, the beautiful character is the unselfish charac-

ter. Those whom we most love and admire are those to whom the thought of self seems never to occur; who do simply and with no ulterior aim—with no thought whether it will be pleasant to themselves or unpleasant—that which is good, and right, and generous.

Is this still selfishness, only more enlightened? I do not think so. The essence of true nobility is neglect of self. Let the thought of self pass in, and the beauty of a great action is gone—like the bloom from a soiled flower. Surely it is a paradox to speak of the self-interest of a martyr who dies for a cause, the triumph of which he will never enjoy; and the greatest of that great company in all ages would have done what they did, had their personal prospects closed with the grave. Nay, there have been those so zealous for some glorious principle, as to wish themselves blotted out of the book of Heaven if the cause of Heaven could succeed.

And out of this mysterious quality, whatever it be, arise the higher relations of human life, the higher modes of human obligation. Kant, the philosopher, used to say that there were two things which overwhelmed him with awe as he thought of them. One was the star-sown deep of space, without limit and without end; the other was, right and wrong. Right, the sacrifice of self to good; wrong, the sacrifice of good to self;—not graduated objects of desire, to which we are determined by the degrees of our knowledge, but wide asunder as pole and pole, as light and darkness—one, the object of infinite love; the other, the object of infinite detestation and scorn. It is in this

marvellous power in men to do wrong (it is an old story, but none the less true for that)—it is in this power to do wrong—wrong or right, as it lies somehow with ourselves to choose—that the impossibility stands of forming scientific calculations of what men will do before the fact, or scientific explanations of what they have done after the fact. If men were consistently selfish, you might analyze their motives; if they were consistently noble, they would express in their conduct the laws of the highest perfection. But so long as two natures are mixed together, and the strange creature which results from the combination is now under one influence and now under another, so long you will make nothing of him except from the old-fashioned moral—or, if you please, imaginative—point of view.

Even the laws of political economy itself cease to guide us when they touch moral government. So long as labour is a chattel to be bought and sold, so long, like other commodities, it follows the condition of supply and demand. But if, for his misfortune, an employer considers that he stands in human relations towards his workmen; if he believes, rightly or wrongly, that he is responsible for them; that in return for their labour he is bound to see that their children are decently taught, and they and their families decently fed, and clothed, and lodged; that he ought to care for them in sickness and in old age; then political economy will no longer direct him, and the relations between himself and his dependents will have to be arranged on other principles.

And it is precisely in this debatable ground of low motives and noble emotions—in the struggle, ever failing, yet ever renewed, to carry truth and justice into the administration of human society; in the establishment of states and in the overthrow of tyrannies; in the rise and fall of creeds; in the world of ideas; in the character and deeds of the great actors in the drama of life; where good and evil fight out their everlasting battle, now ranged in opposite camps, now and more often in the heart, both of them, of each living man—that the true human interest of history resides. The progress of industries, the growth of material and mechanical civilization, are interesting, but they are not the most interesting. They have their reward in the increase of material comforts; but, unless we are mistaken about our nature, they do not highly concern us after all.

Once more; not only is there in men this baffling duality of principle, but there is something else in us which still more defies scientific analysis.

Mr Buckle would deliver himself from the eccentricities of this and that individual by a doctrine of averages. Though he cannot tell whether A, B, or C will cut his throat, he may assure himself that one man in every fifty thousand, or thereabout (I forget the exact proportion), will cut his throat, and with this he consoles himself. No doubt it is a comforting dis-

covery. Unfortunately, the average of one generation need not be the average of the next. We may be converted by the Japanese, for all that we know, and the Japanese methods of taking leave of life may become fashionable among us. Nay, did not Novalis suggest that the whole race of men would at last become so disgusted with their impotence, that they would extinguish themselves by a simultaneous act of suicide, and make room for a better order of beings? Anyhow, the fountain out of which the race is flowing perpetually changes—no two generations are alike. Whether there is a change in the organization itself, we cannot tell; but this is certain, that as the planet varies with the physical atmosphere which surrounds it, so each new generation varies from the last, because it inhales as its spiritual atmosphere the accumulated experience and knowledge of the whole past of the world. These things form the intellectual air which we breathe as we grow; and in the infinite multiplicity of elements of which that air is now composed, it is for ever matter of conjecture what the minds will be like which expand under its influence.

From the England of Fielding and Richardson to the England of Miss Austen—from the England of Miss Austen to the England of Railways and Free-trade, how vast the change; yet perhaps Sir Charles Grandison would not seem so strange to us now, as one of ourselves will seem to our great-grandchildren. The world moves faster and faster; and the difference will probably be considerably greater.

The temper of each new generation is a continual surprise. The fates delight to contradict our most confident expectations. Gibbon believed that the era of conquerors was at an end. Had he lived out the full life of man, he would have seen Europe at the feet of Napoleon. But a few years ago we believed the world had grown too civilized for war, and the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park was to be the inauguration of a new era. Battles, bloody as Napoleon's, are now the familiar tale of every day; and the arts which have made greatest progress are the arts of destruction. What next? We may strain our eyes into the future which lies beyond this waning century; but never was conjecture more at fault. It is blank darkness, which even the imagination fails to people.

What then is the use of History? and what are its lessons? If it can tell us little of the past, and nothing of the future, why waste our time over so barren a study?

First, it is a voice for ever sounding across the centuries the laws of right and wrong. Opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity. For every false word or unrighteous deed, for cruelty and oppression, for lust or vanity, the price has to be paid at last: not always by the chief offenders, but paid by some one. Justice and truth alone endure and live. Injustice and falsehood may be long-lived, but doomsday comes at last to them, in French revolutions and other terrible ways.

That is one lesson of History. Another is, that we should draw no horoscopes; that we should expect little, for what we expect will not come to pass. Revolutions, reformations — those vast movements into which heroes and saints have flung themselves, in the belief that they were the dawn of the millennium — have not borne the fruit which they looked for. Millenniums are still far away. These great convulsions leave the world changed — perhaps improved, — but not improved as the actors in them hoped it would be. Luther would have gone to work with less heart, could he have foreseen the Thirty Years' War, and in the distance the theology of Tübingen. Washington might have hesitated to draw the sword against England, could he have seen the country which he made as we see it now.¹

The most reasonable anticipations fail us — antecedents the most opposite mislead us; because the conditions of human problems never repeat themselves. Some new feature alters everything — some element which we detect only in its after-operation.

But this, it may be said, is but a meagre outcome. Can the long records of humanity, with all its joys and sorrows, its sufferings and its conquests, teach us no more than this? Let us approach the subject, from another side.

If you were asked to point out the special features in which Shakespeare's plays are so transcendently

¹ February, 1864.

excellent, you would mention, perhaps, among others, this, that his stories are not put together, and his characters are not conceived, to illustrate any particular law or principle. They teach many lessons, but not any one prominent above another; and when we have drawn from them all the direct instruction which they contain, there remains still something unresolved—something which the artist gives, and which the philosopher cannot give.

It is in this characteristic that we are accustomed to say Shakespeare's supreme *truth* lies. He represents real life. His dramas teach us life teaches—neither less nor more. He builds his fabrics as nature does, on right and wrong; but he does not struggle to make nature more systematic than she is. In the subtle interflow of good and evil—in the unmerited sufferings of innocence—in the disproportion of penalties to desert—in the seeming blindness with which justice, in attempting to assert itself, overwhelms innocent and guilty in a common ruin—Shakespeare is true to real experience. The mystery of life he leaves as he finds it; and, in his most tremendous positions, he is addressing rather the intellectual emotions than the understanding,—knowing well that the understanding in such things is at fault, and the sage as ignorant as the child.

Only the highest order of genius can represent nature thus. An inferior artist produces either something entirely immoral, where good and evil are names, and nobility of disposition is supposed to show itself in

the absolute disregard of them—or else, if he is a better kind of man, he will force on nature a didactic purpose; he composes what are called moral tales, which may edify the conscience, but only mislead the intellect.

The finest work of this kind produced in modern times is Lessing's play of 'Nathan the Wise.' The object of it is to teach religious toleration. The doctrine is admirable—the mode in which it is enforced, is interesting; but it has the fatal fault, that it is not true. Nature does not teach religious toleration by any such direct method; and the result is—no one knew it better than Lessing himself—that the play is not poetry, but only splendid manufacture. Shakespeare is eternal; Lessing's 'Nathan' will pass away with the mode of thought which gave it birth. One is based on fact; the other, on human theory about fact. The theory seems at first sight to contain the most immediate instruction; but it is not really so.

Cibber and others, as you know, wanted to alter Shakespeare. The French king, in 'Lear,' was to be got rid of; Cordelia was to marry Edgar, and Lear himself was to be rewarded for his sufferings by a golden old age. They could not bear that Hamlet should suffer for the sins of Claudius. The wicked king was to die, and the wicked mother; and Hamlet and Ophelia were to make a match of it, and live happily ever after. A common novelist would have arranged it thus; and you would have had your comfortable moral that wickedness was fitly punished, and virtue had its due reward, and all would have been

well. But Shakespeare would not have it so. Shakespeare knew that crime was not so simple in its consequences, or Providence so paternal. He was contented to take the truth from life; and the effect upon the mind of the most correct theory of what life ought to be, compared to the effect of the life itself, is infinitesimal in comparison.

Again, let us compare the popular historical treatment of remarkable incidents with Shakespeare's treatment of them. Look at 'Macbeth.' You may derive abundant instruction from it—instruction of many kinds. There is a moral lesson of profound interest in the steps by which a noble nature glides to perdition. In more modern fashion you may speculate, if you like, on the political conditions represented there, and the temptation presented in absolute monarchies to unscrupulous ambition; you may say, like Dr Slop, these things could not have happened under a constitutional government; or, again, you may take up your parable against superstition—you may dilate on the frightful consequences of a belief in witches, and reflect on the superior advantages of an age of schools and newspapers. If the bare facts of the story had come down to us from a chronicler, and an ordinary writer of the nineteenth century had undertaken to relate them, his account, we may depend upon it, would have been put together upon one or other of these principles. Yet, by the side of that unfolding of the secrets of the prison-house of the soul, what lean and shrivelled anatomies the best of such descriptions would seem!

Shakespeare himself, I suppose, could not have given us a theory of what he meant—he gave us the thing itself, on which we might make whatever theories we pleased.

Or again, look at Homer.

The 'Iliad' is from two to three thousand years older than 'Macbeth,' and yet it is as fresh as if it had been written yesterday. We have there no lessons save in the emotions which rise in us as we read. Homer had no philosophy; he never struggled to impress upon us his views about this or that; you can scarcely tell indeed whether his sympathies are Greek or Trojan; but he represents to us faithfully the men and women among whom he lived. He sang the Tale of Troy, he touched his lyre, he drained the golden beaker in the halls of men like those on whom he was conferring immortality. And thus, although no Agamemnon, king of men, ever led a Grecian fleet to Ilium; though no Priam sought the midnight tent of Achilles; though Ulysses and Diomed and Nestor were but names, and Helen but a dream, yet, through Homer's power of representing men and women, those old Greeks will still stand out from amidst the darkness of the ancient world with a sharpness of outline which belongs to no period of history except the most recent. For the mere hard purposes of history, the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey' are the most effective books which ever were written. We see the Hall of Menelaus, we see the garden of Alcinous, we see Nausicaa among her maidens on the shore, we see the mellow monarch sitting with

ivory sceptre in the Market-place dealing out genial justice. Or again, when the wild mood is on, we can hear the crash of the spears, the rattle of the armour as the heroes fall, and the plunging of the horses among the slain. Could we enter the palace of an old Ionian lord, we know what we should see there; we know the words in which he would address us. We could meet Hector as a friend. If we could choose a companion to spend an evening with over a fireside, it would be the man of many counsels, the husband of Penelope.

I am not going into the vexed question whether History or Poetry is the more true. It has been sometimes said that Poetry is the more true, because it can make things more like what our moral sense would prefer they should be. We hear of poetic justice and the like, as if nature and fact were not just enough.

I entirely dissent from that view. So far as poetry attempts to improve on truth in that way, so far it abandons truth, and is false to itself. Even literal facts, exactly as they were, a great poet will prefer whenever he can get them. Shakespeare in the historical plays is studious, wherever possible, to give the very words which he finds to have been used; and it shows how wisely he was guided in this, that those magnificent speeches of Wolsey are taken exactly, with no more change than the metre makes necessary, from Caven-
dish's Life. Marlborough read Shakespeare for English history, and read nothing else. The poet only is not bound, when it is inconvenient, to what may be called the accidents of facts. It was enough for Shakespeare

to know that Prince Hal in his youth had lived among loose companions, and the tavern in Eastcheap came in to fill out his picture; although Mrs Quickly and Falstaff, and Poins and Bardolph, were more likely to have been fallen in with by Shakespeare himself at the Mermaid, than to have been comrades of the true Prince Henry. It was enough for Shakespeare to draw real men, and the situation, whatever it might be, would sit easy on them. In this sense only it is that Poetry is truer than History, that it can make a picture more complete. It may take liberties with time and space, and give the action distinctness by throwing it into more manageable compass.

But it may not alter the real conditions of things, or represent life as other than it is. The greatness of the poet depends on his being true to nature, without insisting that nature should theorize with him, without making her more just, more philosophical, more moral than reality; and, in difficult matters, leaving much to reflection which cannot be explained.

And if this be true of Poetry—if Homer and Shakespeare are what they are, from the absence of everything didactic about them—may we not thus learn something of what History should be, and in what sense it should aspire to teach?

If Poetry must not theorize, much less should the historian theorize, whose obligations to be true to fact are even greater than the poet's. If the drama is grandest when the action is least explicable by laws, because then it best resembles life, then history will be

grandest also under the same conditions. 'Macbeth,' were it literally true, would be perfect history; and so far as the historian can approach to that kind of model, so far as he can let his story tell itself in the deeds and words of those who act it out, so far is he most successful. His work is no longer the vapour of his own brain, which a breath will scatter; it is the thing itself, which will have interest for all time. A thousand theories may be formed about it—spiritual theories, Pantheistic theories, cause and effect theories; but each age will have its own philosophy of history, and all these in turn will fail and die. Hegel falls out of date, Schlegel falls out of date, and Comte in good time will fall out of date; the thought about the thing must change as we change; but the thing itself can never change; and a history is durable or perishable as it contains more or less of the writer's own speculations. The splendid intellect of Gibbon for the most part kept him true to the right course in this; yet the philosophical chapters for which he has been most admired or censured may hereafter be thought the least interesting in his work. The time has been when they would not have been comprehended: the time may come when they will seem commonplace.

It may be said, that in requiring history to be written like a drama, we require an impossibility.

For history to be written with the complete form of a drama, doubtless is impossible; but there are periods, and these the periods, for the most part, of greatest interest to mankind, the history of which may be so written that

the actors shall reveal their characters in their own words; where mind can be seen matched against mind, and the great passions of the epoch not simply be described as existing, but be exhibited at their white heat in the souls and hearts possessed by them. There are all the elements of drama—drama of the highest order—where the huge forces of the times are as the Grecian destiny, and the power of the man is seen either stemming the stream till it overwhelms him, or ruling while he seems to yield to it.

It is Nature's drama—not Shakespeare's—but a drama none the less.

So at least it seems to me. Wherever possible, let us not be told *about* this man or that. Let us hear the man himself speak, let us see him act, and let us be left to form our own opinions about him. The historian, we are told, must not leave his readers to themselves. He must not only lay the facts before them—he must tell them what he himself thinks about those facts. In my opinion, this is precisely what he ought not to do. Bishop Butler says somewhere, that the best book which could be written would be a book consisting only of premises, from which the readers should draw conclusions for themselves. The highest poetry is the very thing which Butler requires, and the highest history ought to be. We should no more ask for a theory of this or that period of history, than we should ask for a theory of 'Macbeth' or 'Hamlet.' Philosophies of history, sciences of history—all these, there will continue to be; the fashions of them will change, as our habits

of thought will change; and each new philosopher will find his chief employment in showing that before him no one understood anything. But the drama of history is imperishable, and the lessons of it will be like what we learn from Homer or Shakespeare—lessons for which we have no words.

The address of history is less to the understanding than to the higher emotions. We learn in it to sympathize with what is great and good; we learn to hate what is base. In the anomalies of fortune we feel the mystery of our mortal existence, and in the companionship of the illustrious natures who have shaped the fortunes of the world, we escape from the littlenesses which cling to the round of common life, and our minds are tuned in a higher and nobler key.

For the rest, and for those large questions which I touched in connection with Mr Buckle, we live in times of disintegration, and none can tell what will be after us. What opinions—what convictions—the infant of to-day will find prevailing on the earth, if he and it live out together to the middle of another century, only a very bold man would undertake to conjecture! ‘The time will come,’ said Lichtenberg, in scorn at the materializing tendencies of modern thought; ‘the time will come when the belief in God will be as the tales with which old women frighten children; when the world will be a machine, the ether a gas, and God will be a force.’ Mankind, if they last long enough on the earth, may develope strange things out of themselves; and the growth of what is called the Positive Philosophy

is a curious commentary on Lichtenberg's prophecy. But whether the end be seventy years hence, or seven hundred—be the close of the mortal history of humanity as far distant in the future as its shadowy beginnings seem now to lie behind us—this only we may foretell with confidence—that the riddle of man's nature will remain unsolved. There will be that in him yet which physical laws will fail to explain—that something, whatever it be, in himself, and in the world, which science cannot fathom, and which suggests the unknown possibilities of his origin and his destiny. There will remain yet

Those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things ;
Falling from us, vanishings—
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized—
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Doth tremble like a guilty thing surprised.

There will remain

Those first affections—
Those shadowy recollections—
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day—
Are yet the master-light of all our seeing—
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the Eternal Silence.

TIMES OF ERASMUS AND LUTHER:

THREE LECTURES

DELIVERED AT NEWCASTLE, 1867.

I.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—I do not know whether I have made a very wise selection in the subject which I have chosen for these Lectures. There was a time—a time which, measured by the years of our national life, was not so very long ago—when the serious thoughts of mankind were occupied exclusively by religion and politics. The small knowledge which they possessed of other things was tinged by their speculative opinions on the relations of heaven and earth; and, down to the sixteenth century, art, science, scarcely even literature, existed in this country, except as, in some way or other, subordinate to theology. Philosophers—such philosophers as there were—obtained and half deserved the reputation of quacks and conjurers. Astronomy was confused with astrology,

The physician's medicines were supposed to be powerless, unless the priests said prayers over them. The great lawyers, the ambassadors, the chief ministers of state, were generally bishops; even the fighting business was not entirely secular. Half-a-dozen Scotch prelates were killed at Flodden; and, late in the reign of Henry the Eighth, no fitter person could be found than Rowland Lee, Bishop of Coventry, to take command of the Welsh Marches, and harry the freebooters of Llangollen.

Every single department of intellectual or practical life was penetrated with the beliefs, or was interwoven with the interests, of the clergy; and thus it was that, when differences of religious opinion arose, they split society to its foundations. The lines of cleavage penetrated everywhere, and there were no subjects whatever in which those who disagreed in theology possessed any common concern. When men quarrelled, they quarrelled altogether. The disturbers of settled beliefs were regarded as public enemies who had placed themselves beyond the pale of humanity, and were considered fit only to be destroyed like wild beasts, or trampled out like the seed of a contagion.

Three centuries have passed over our heads since the time of which I am speaking, and the world is so changed that we can hardly recognize it as the same.

The secrets of nature have been opened out to us on a thousand lines; and men of science of all creeds can pursue side by side their common investigations. Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Calvinists,

contend with each other in honourable rivalry in arts, and literature, and commerce, and industry. They read the same books. They study at the same academies. They have seats in the same senates. They preside together on the judicial bench, and carry on, without jar or difference, the ordinary business of the country.

Those who share the same pursuits are drawn in spite of themselves into sympathy and good-will. When they are in harmony in so large a part of their occupations, the points of remaining difference lose their venom. Those who thought they hated each other, unconsciously find themselves friends; and as far as it affects the world at large, the acrimony of controversy has almost disappeared.

Imagine, if you can, a person being now put to death for a speculative theological opinion. You feel at once, that in the most bigoted country in the world such a thing has become impossible; and the impossibility is the measure of the alteration which we have all undergone. The formulas remain as they were on either side—the very same formulas which were once supposed to require these detestable murders. But we have learnt to know each other better. The cords which bind together the brotherhood of mankind are woven of a thousand strands. We do not any more fly apart or become enemies, because, here and there, in one strand out of so many, there are still unsound places.

If I were asked for a distinct proof that Europe was improving and not retrograding, I should find it in

this phenomenon. It has not been brought about by controversy. Men are fighting still over the same questions which they began to fight about at the Reformation. Protestant divines have not driven Catholics out of the field, nor Catholics, Protestants. Each polemic writes for his own partisans, and makes no impression on his adversary.

Controversy has kept alive a certain quantity of bitterness; and that, I suspect, is all that it would accomplish if it continued till the day of judgment. I sometimes, in impatient moments, wish the laity in Europe would treat their controversial divines as two gentlemen once treated their seconds, when they found themselves forced into a duel without knowing what they were quarrelling about.

As the principals were being led up to their places, one of them whispered to the other, 'If you will shoot your second, I will shoot mine.'

The reconciliation of parties, if I may use such a word, is no tinkered-up truce, or convenient Interim. It is the healthy, silent, spontaneous growth of a nobler order of conviction, which has conquered our prejudices even before we knew that they were assailed. This better spirit especially is represented in institutions like the present, which acknowledge no differences of creed—which are constructed on the broadest principles of toleration—and which, therefore, as a rule, are wisely protected from the intrusion of discordant subjects.

They exist, as I understand, to draw men together, not to divide them—to enable us to share together in

from practices which I count so very excellent; I feel that I shall give you rather a lame answer. I might say that I know more about the history of the sixteenth century than I know about anything else. I have spent the best years of my life in reading and writing about it; and if I have anything to tell you worth your hearing, it is probably on that subject.

Or, again, I might say—which is indeed most true—that to the Reformation we can trace, indirectly, the best of those very influences which I have been describing. The Reformation broke the theological shackles in which men's minds were fettered. It set them thinking, and so gave birth to science. The reformers also, without knowing what they were about, taught the lesson of religious toleration. They attempted to supersede one set of dogmas by another. They succeeded with half the world—they failed with the other half. In a little while it became apparent that good men—without ceasing to be good—could think differently about theology, and that goodness, therefore, depended on something else than the holding orthodox opinions.

It is not, however, for either of these reasons that I am going to talk to you about Martin Luther: nor is toleration of differences of opinion, however excellent it be, the point on which I shall dwell in these Lectures.

Were the Reformation a question merely of opinion,

I for one should not have meddled with it, either here or anywhere. I hold that, on the obscure mysteries of faith, every one should be allowed to believe according to his conscience, and that arguments on such matters are either impertinent or useless.

But the Reformation, gentlemen, beyond the region of opinions, was a historical fact—an objective something which may be studied like any of the facts of nature. The Reformers were men of note and distinction, who played a great part for good or evil on the stage of the world. If we except the Apostles, no body of human beings ever printed so deep a mark into the organization of society; and if there be any value or meaning in history at all, the lives, the actions, the characters of such men as these can be matters of indifference to none of us.

We have not to do with a story which is buried in obscure antiquity. The facts admit of being learnt. The truth, whatever it was, concerns us all equally. If the divisions created by that great convulsion are ever to be obliterated, it will be when we have learnt, each of us, to see the thing as it really was, and not rather some mythical or imaginative version of the thing—such as from our own point of view we like to think it was. Fiction in such matters may be convenient for our immediate theories, but it is certain to avenge itself in the end. We may make our own opinions, but facts were made for us; and if we evade or deny them, it will be the worse for us.

Unfortunately, the mythical version at present very

population of Europe enslaved by a corrupt and degraded priesthood, and the Reformers, with the Bible in their hands, coming to the rescue like angels of light. All is black on one side—all is fair and beautiful on the other.

Turn to a Catholic history of the same events and the same men, and we have before us the Church of the Saints fulfilling quietly its blessed mission in the saving of human souls. Satan a second time enters into Paradise, and a second time with fatal success tempts miserable man to his ruin. He disbelieves his appointed teachers, he aspires after forbidden knowledge, and at once anarchy breaks loose. The seamless robe of the Saviour is rent in pieces, and the earth becomes the habitation of fiends.

Each side tells the story as it prefers to have it; facts, characters, circumstances, are melted in the theological crucible, and cast in moulds diametrically opposite. Nothing remains the same except the names and dates. Each side chooses its own witnesses. Everything is credible which makes for what it calls the truth. Everything is made false which will not fit into its place. 'Blasphemous fables' is the usual expression in Protestant controversial books for the accounts given by Catholics. 'Protestant tradition,' says an eminent modern Catholic, 'is based on lying—bold, wholesale, unscrupulous lying.'

Now, depend upon it, there is some human account of the matter different from both these if we could only get at it, and it will be an excellent thing for the world when that human account can be made out. I am not so presumptuous as to suppose that I can give it to you; still less can you expect me to try to do so within the compass of two or three lectures. If I cannot do everything, however, I believe I can do a little; at any rate I can give you a sketch, such as you may place moderate confidence in, of the state of the Church as it was before the Reformation began. I will not expose myself more than I can help to the censure of the divine who was so hard on Protestant tradition. Most of what I shall have to say to you this evening will be taken from the admissions of Catholics themselves, or from official records earlier than the outbreak of the controversy, when there was no temptation to pervert the truth.

Here, obviously, is the first point on which we require accurate information. If all was going on well, the Reformers really and truly told innumerable lies, and deserve all the reprobation which we can give them. If all was not going on well—if, so far from being well, the Church was so corrupt that Europe could bear with it no longer—then clearly a Reformation was necessary of some kind; and we have taken one step towards a fair estimate of the persons concerned in it.

A fair estimate—that, and only that, is what we want. I need hardly observe to you, that opinion in England has been undergoing lately a very considerable alteration about these persons.

antism as a kind of infidelity, who desire simply to reverse everything which the Reformers did.

One of these gentlemen, a clergyman writing lately of Luther, called him a heretic, a heretic fit only to be ranked with—whom, do you think?—Joe Smith, the Mormon Prophet. Joe Smith and Luther—that is the combination with which we are now presented.

The book in which this remarkable statement appeared was presented by two bishops to the Upper House of Convocation. It was received with gracious acknowledgments by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was placed solemnly in the library of reference, for that learned body to consult.

So, too, a professor at Oxford, the other day, spoke of Luther as a Philistine—a Philistine meaning an oppressor of the chosen people; the enemy of men of culture, and intelligence, such as the professor himself.

One notices these things, not as of much importance in themselves, but as showing which way the stream is running; and, curiously enough, in quite another direction we may see the same phenomenon. Our liberal philosophers, men of high literary power and reputation, looking into the history of Luther, and Calvin, and John Knox, and the rest, find them falling far short of the philosophic ideal—wanting sadly in many qualities which the liberal mind cannot dispense

with. They are discovered to be intolerant, dogmatic, narrow-minded, inclined to persecute Catholics as Catholics had persecuted them; to be, in fact, little if at all better than the popes and cardinals whom they were fighting against.

Lord Macaulay can hardly find epithets strong enough to express his contempt for Archbishop Cranmer. Mr Buckle places Cranmer by the side of Bonner, and hesitates which of the two characters is the more detestable. .

An unfavourable estimate of the Reformers, whether just or unjust, is unquestionably gaining ground among our advanced thinkers. A greater man than either Macaulay or Buckle—the German poet, Goethe—says of Luther, that he threw back the intellectual progress of mankind for centuries, by calling in the passions of the multitude to decide on subjects which ought to have been left to the learned. Goethe, in saying this, was alluding especially to Erasmus. Goethe thought that Erasmus, and men like Erasmus, had struck upon the right track; and if they could have retained the direction of the mind of Europe, there would have been more truth, and less falsehood, among us at this present time. The party hatreds, the theological rivalries, the persecutions, the civil wars, the religious animosities which have so long distracted us, would have been all avoided, and the mind of mankind would have expanded gradually and equably with the growth of knowledge.

Such an opinion, coming from so great a man, is not to be lightly passed over. It will be my endeavour

to show you what kind of man Erasmus was, what he was aiming at, what he was doing, and how Luther spoilt his work—if spoiling is the word which we are to use for it.

One caution, however, I must in fairness give you before we proceed further. It lies upon the face of the story, that the Reformers imperfectly understood toleration; but you must keep before you the spirit and temper of the men with whom they had to deal. For themselves, when the movement began, they aimed at nothing but liberty to think and speak their own way. They never dreamt of interfering with others, although they were quite aware that others, when they could, were likely to interfere with them. Lord Macaulay might have remembered that Cranmer was working all his life with the prospect of being burnt alive as his reward—and, as we all know, he actually was burnt alive.

When the Protestant teaching began first to spread in the Netherlands—before one single Catholic had been ill-treated there, before a symptom of a mutinous disposition had shown itself among the people, an edict was issued by the authorities for the suppression of the new opinions.

The terms of this edict I will briefly describe to you.

The inhabitants of the United Provinces were informed that they were to hold and believe the doctrines of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. ‘Men and women,’ says the edict, ‘who disobey this command shall be punished as disturbers of public order. Women

who have fallen into heresy shall be buried alive. Men, if they recant, shall lose their heads. If they continue obstinate, they shall be burnt at the stake.

'If man or woman be suspected of heresy, no one shall shelter or protect him or her; and no stranger shall be admitted to lodge in any inn or dwelling-house unless he bring with him a testimonial of orthodoxy from the priest of his parish.

'The Inquisition shall inquire into the private opinions of every person, of whatever degree; and all officers of all kinds shall assist the Inquisition at their peril. Those who know where heretics are concealed, shall denounce them, or they shall suffer as heretics themselves. Heretics (observe the malignity of this paragraph)—heretics who will give up other heretics to justice, shall themselves be pardoned if they will promise to conform for the future.'

Under this edict, in the Netherlands alone, more than fifty thousand human beings, first and last, were deliberately murdered. And, gentlemen, I must say that proceedings of this kind explain and go far to excuse the subsequent intolerance of Protestants.

Intolerance, Mr Gibbon tells us, is a greater crime in a Protestant than a Catholic. Criminal intolerance, as I understand it, is the intolerance of such an edict as that which I have read to you—the unprovoked intolerance of difference of opinion. I conceive that the most enlightened philosopher might have grown hard and narrow-minded if he had suffered under the administration of the Duke of Alva.

Dismissing these considerations, I will now go on with my subject.

Never in all their history, in ancient times or modern, never that we know of, have mankind thrown out of themselves anything so grand, so useful, so beautiful, as the Catholic Church once was. In these times of ours, well-regulated selfishness is the recognized rule of action—every one of us is expected to look out first for himself, and take care of his own interests. At the time I speak of, the Church ruled the State with the authority of a conscience; and self-interest, as a motive of action, was only named to be abhorred. The bishops and clergy were regarded freely and simply as the immediate ministers of the Almighty; and they seem to me to have really deserved that high estimate of their character. It was not for the doctrines which they taught only, or chiefly, that they were held in honour. Brave men do not fall down before their fellow-mortals for the words which they speak, or for the rites which they perform. Wisdom, justice, self-denial, nobleness, purity, highmindedness,—these are the qualities before which the free-born races of Europe have been contented to bow; and in no order of men were such qualities to be found as they were found six hundred years ago in the clergy of the Catholic Church. They called themselves the successors of the Apostles. They claimed in their Master's name universal spiritual authority, but they made good their pretensions by the holiness of their own lives. They were allowed to rule because they deserved to rule, and in the fulness of re-

verence kings and nobles bent before a power which was nearer to God than their own. Over prince and subject, chieftain and serf, a body of unarmed defenceless men reigned supreme by the magic of sanctity. They tamed the fiery northern warriors who had broken in pieces the Roman Empire. They taught them—they brought them really and truly to believe—that they had immortal souls, and that they would one day stand at the awful judgment bar and give account for their lives there. With the brave, the honest, and the good—with those who had not oppressed the poor nor removed their neighbour's landmark—with those who had been just in all their dealings—with those who had fought against evil, and had tried valiantly to do their Master's will,—at that great day, it would be well. For cowards, for profligates, for those who lived for luxury and pleasure and self-indulgence, there was the blackness of eternal death.

An awful conviction of this tremendous kind the clergy had effectually instilled into the mind of Europe. It was not a *PERHAPS*; it was a certainty. It was not a form of words repeated once a week at church; it was an assurance entertained on all days and in all places, without any particle of doubt. And the effect of such a belief on life and conscience was simply immeasurable.

I do not pretend that the clergy were perfect. They were very far from perfect at the best of times, and the European nations were never completely submissive to them. It would not have been well if they

tinued to interest men, though priests insisted on their nothingness. They could not prevent kings from quarrelling with each other. They could not hinder disputed successions, and civil feuds, and wars, and political conspiracies. What they did do was to shelter the weak from the strong.

In the eyes of the clergy, the serf and his lord stood on the common level of sinful humanity. Into their ranks high birth was no passport. They were themselves for the most part children of the people; and the son of the artisan or peasant rose to the mitre and the triple crown, just as now-a-days the rail-splitter and the tailor become Presidents of the Republic of the West.

The Church was essentially democratic, while at the same time it had the monopoly of learning; and all the secular power fell to it which learning, combined with sanctity and assisted by superstition, can bestow.

The privileges of the clergy were extraordinary. They were not amenable to the common laws of the land. While they governed the laity, the laity had no power over them. From the throne downwards, every secular office was dependent on the Church. No king was a lawful sovereign till the Church placed the crown upon his head: and what the Church bestowed, the Church claimed the right to take away. The disposition of property was in their hands. No will

could be proved except before the bishop or his officer; and no will was held valid if the testator died out of communion. There were magistrates and courts of law for the offences of the laity. If a priest committed a crime, he was a sacred person. The civil power could not touch him; he was reserved for his ordinary. Bishops' commissaries sat in town and city, taking cognizance of the moral conduct of every man and woman. Offences against life and property were tried here in England, as now, by the common law; but the Church Courts dealt with sins—sins of word or act. If a man was a profligate or a drunkard; if he lied or swore; if he did not come to communion, or held unlawful opinions; if he was idle or unthrifty; if he was unkind to his wife or his servants; if a child was disobedient to his father, or a father cruel to his child; if a tradesman sold adulterated wares, or used false measures or dishonest weights,—the eye of the parish priest was everywhere, and the Church Court stood always open to examine and to punish.

Imagine what a tremendous power this must have been! Yet it existed generally in Catholic Europe down to the eve of the Reformation. It could never have established itself at all unless at one time it had worked beneficially—as the abuse of it was one of the most fatal causes of the Church's fall.

I know nothing in English history much more striking than the answer given by Archbishop Warham to the complaints of the English House of Commons after the fall of Cardinal Wolsey. The House of Com-

Commons said, were often at variance with the laws of the realm.

What did Warham reply? He said he was sorry for the alleged discrepancy; but, inasmuch as the laws made by the clergy were always in conformity with the will of God, the laws of the realm had only to be altered and then the difficulty would vanish.

What must have been the position of the clergy in the fulness of their power, when they could speak thus on the eve of their prostration? You have only to look from a distance at any old-fashioned cathedral city, and you will see in a moment the mediæval relations between Church and State. The cathedral *is* the city. The first object you catch sight of as you approach is the spire tapering into the sky, or the huge towers holding possession of the centre of the landscape—majestically beautiful—imposing by mere size amidst the large forms of Nature herself. As you go nearer, the vastness of the building impresses you more and more. The puny dwelling-places of the citizens creep at its feet, the pinnacles are glittering in the tints of the sunset, when down below among the streets and lanes the twilight is darkening. And even now, when the towns are thrice their ancient size, and the houses have stretched upwards from two stories to five; when the great chimneys are vomiting their smoke among the clouds, and the temples of modern industry—the

in the picture and the subject which possesses the imagination and refuses to be eclipsed.

As that cathedral was to the old town, so was the Church of the middle ages to the secular institutions of the world. Its very neighbourhood was sacred; and its shadow, like the shadow of the Apostles, was a sanctuary. When I look at the new Houses of Parliament in London, I see in them a type of the change which has passed over us. The House of Commons of the Plantagenets sat in the Chapter House of Westminster Abbey. The Parliament of the Reform Bill, five-and-thirty years ago, debated in St. Stephen's Chapel, the Abbey's small dependency. Now, by the side of the enormous pile which has risen out of that chapel's ashes, the proud Minster itself is dwarfed into insignificance.

Let us turn to another vast feature of the middle ages—I mean the monasteries.

Some person of especial and exceptional holiness has lived or died at a particular spot. He has been distinguished by his wisdom, by his piety, by his active benevolence; and in an age when conjurers and witches were supposed to be helped by the devil to do evil, he, on his part, has been thought to have possessed in larger measure than common men the favour and the grace of heaven. Blessed influences hang about the spot which he has hallowed by his presence. His relics—his household possessions, his books, his clothes,

his bones, retain the shadowy sanctity which they received in having once belonged to him. We all set a value, not wholly unreal, on anything which has been the property of a remarkable man. At worst, it is but an exaggeration of natural reverence.

Well, as now-a-days we build monuments to great men, so in the middle ages they built shrines or chapels on the spots which saints had made holy, and communities of pious people gathered together there—beginning with the personal friends the saint had left behind him—to try to live as he had lived, to do good as he had done good, and to die as he had died. Thus arose religious fraternities—companies of men who desired to devote themselves to goodness—to give up pleasure, and amusement, and self-indulgence, and to spend their lives in prayer and works of charity.

These houses became centres of pious beneficence. The monks, as the brotherhoods were called, were organized in different orders, with some variety of rule, but the broad principle was the same in all. They were to live for others, not for themselves. They took vows of poverty, that they might not be entangled in the pursuit of money. They took vows of chastity, that the care of a family might not distract them from the work which they had undertaken. Their efforts of charity were not limited to this world. Their days were spent in hard bodily labour, in study, or in visiting the sick. At night they were on the stone-floors of their chapels, holding up their withered hands to heaven, interceding for the poor souls who were suffering in purgatory.

The world, as it always will, paid honour to exceptional excellence. The system spread to the furthest limits of Christendom. The religious houses became places of refuge, where men of noble birth, kings and queens and emperors, warriors and statesmen, retired to lay down their splendid cares, and end their days in peace. Those with whom the world had dealt hardly, or those whom it had surfeited with its unsatisfying pleasures, those who were disappointed with earth, and those who were filled with passionate aspirations after heaven, alike found a haven of rest in the quiet cloister. And, gradually, lands came to them, and wealth, and social dignity—all gratefully extended to men who deserved so well of their fellows; while no landlords were more popular than they, for the sanctity of the monks sheltered their dependents as well as themselves.

Travel now through Ireland, and you will see in the wildest parts of it innumerable remains of religious houses, which had grown up among a people who acknowledged no rule among themselves except the sword, and where every chief made war upon his neighbour as the humour seized him. The monks among the O's and the Mac's were as defenceless as sheep among the wolves; but the wolves spared them for their character. In such a country as Ireland then was, the monasteries could not have survived for a generation but for the enchanted atmosphere which surrounded them.

Of authority the religious orders were practically

monastery, nor even send a policeman to arrest a criminal who had taken shelter within its walls. Archbishops and bishops, powerful as they were, found their authority cease when they entered the gates of a Benedictine or Dominican abbey.

So utterly have times changed, that with your utmost exertions you will hardly be able to picture to yourselves the Catholic Church in the days of its greatness. Our school-books tell us how the Emperor of Germany held the stirrup for Pope Gregory the Seventh to mount his mule; how our own English Henry Plantagenet walked barefoot through the streets of Canterbury, and knelt in the Chapter House for the monks to flog him. The first of these incidents, I was brought up to believe, proved the Pope to be the man of Sin. Anyhow, they are both facts, and not romances; and you may form some notion from them how high in the world's eyes the Church must have stood.

And be sure it did not achieve that proud position without deserving it. The Teutonic and Latin princes were not credulous fools; and when they submitted, it was to something stronger than themselves—stronger in limb and muscle, or stronger in intellect and character.

So the Church was in its vigour: so the Church was *not* at the opening of the sixteenth century. Power—wealth—security—men are more than mortal if they